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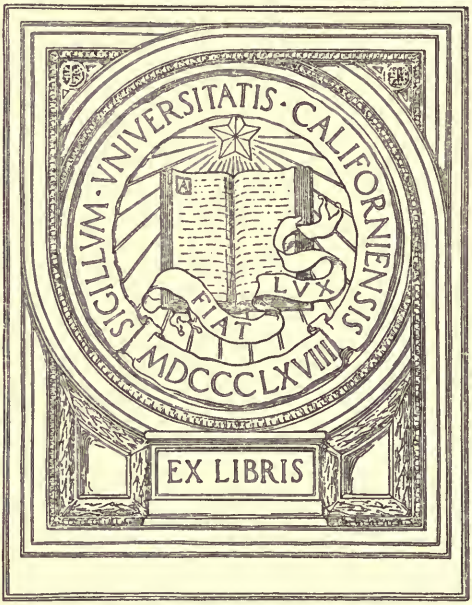

A BUNDLE OF MYRRH

By John G. Neihardt

A Bundle of Myrrh

Man-Song

The Dawn-Builder

The River and I

The Lonesome Trail

A Bundle of Myrrh

by

John G. Neihardt

MITCHELL KENNERLEY
NEW YORK AND LONDON
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DEDICATION

When I—the fool—am dead,
There will be one to stand above my head,
Her wan lips yearning toward my quiet lips
That stung her soul so oft with bitter cries.
And I shall feel forgiving finger-tips
And I shall hear her saying with her sighs:
"This fool I mothered sucked a bitter breast;
His life was fever and his soul was fire:
O burning fool, O restless fool at rest,
None knew but I how high you could aspire,
None knew but I how deep your soul could sink!"

And when these words above the fool are said,
The others ranged about the room shall think
The fool is dead.

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" Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
Fair as the moon,
Clear as the sun,
And terrible as an army with banners? "

PRELUDE

I WOULD sing as the Wind;
As the autumn Wind, big with rain and sad with prenatal dread.
I would sing as the Storm;
As the Storm whipped by the lightning and strong with the despair of giants.
I would sing as the Snow;
Wailing and hissing and writhing in the merciless grasp of the Blizzard.
I would sing as the Prairie;
As the Prairie droning in the heat, satisfied, drowsy and mystical.
Rhymeless or meterless—carelessly;
Artless as Joy or as Sorrow;
Artless as Winds in their gladness or Winds in their anger.
For I am a part of the Prairie,
Part of the Wind and the Lightning.
I love as the Prairie would love,
As the Storm would hate, I hate!
I feel the despair of the Dusk!
I joy with the joy of the River!
Even as these would sing in their differing moods, I sing!

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A BUNDLE OF MYRRH

A Sequence of Songs and Chants

A BUNDLE OF MYRRH

I

LINES IN LATE MARCH

I WHISTLE: why not?
Have I not seen the first strips of green winding
up the sloughs?
Have I not heard the meadow-lark?
I have looked into the soft blue skies and have been
uplifted!

Where are the doubts and dark ideas I entertained?
What have I caught from the maple-buds that
changes me?
Or was it the meadow-lark—or the blue sky—or the
strips of green?
The green that winds up the sloughs?

I sought the dark and found much of it.
Is there in truth much darkness?
Have the meadow-larks lied to me?
Have the green grass and the blue sky testified falsely?

I want to trust the sky and the grass!
I want to believe the songs I hear from the fence-posts!
Why should a maple-bud mislead me?

II

I AM AS A CLOUD

I AM dark as a cloud—a cloud of winter.
She is sunlight: she looks upon me, and lo! I am golden.
Her softest step stirs me as the beating of a drum!
She sings!
Her voice wraps me like a caress
Ah—the caress of a woman!
I would that I were a rose upon a bush her whim had chosen.
Even for a day would I be a rose.
In the evening I would not complain to feel the frost upon my head—
The frost upon my head!
Or sweeter still, I would be plucked by her with a great pang;
And as my stem parted I would bleed fragrant dew.
Upon her finger-tips I would bleed odorous dew.
And I would not complain about the hours of growing;
I would not cry out about them, saying They are wasted.
The pain made by her innocent enjoyment would suffice—
It would suffice.

III

THE WITLESS MUSICIAN

SHE is my violin!
As the violinist lays his ear to his instrument
That he may catch the low vibrations of the deeper strings,
Thus I lay my ear to her breast.
I hear her blood singing and I am shaken with ecstacy;
For am I not the musician?

She is my harp—I play upon her.
I touch her, and she trembles as a harp with the first chord of revery.
I lay my hands upon her with that divine thrill in my finger-tips,
That reverent nervousness of the fingers,
Which a harpist feels when he reaches for a ravishing chord,
Elusive chord from among the labyrinthine strings.

I am a musician for the first time!
I have found an instrument to play upon!
She is my violin—she is my harp!

A song slept in her blood.
None had found it—and it slept.
Lo! I—even I who am so poor in power,
Who was a pauper in conception of harmony,
I have awakened by chance the slumbering song!

It wraps me as with a vast mantle!
I am covered completely.
I hear nothing; I see nothing;
I only feel that song which I have awakened mysteriously.

Lo, I, the witless musician!
I have played even as Masters of Melody,
Even as Masters of Song!

IV

THE SOUND MY SPIRIT CALLS YOU

I WOULD I knew some slow soft sound to call
you:
Some slow soft syllable that should linger on the lip
As loath to pass, because of its own sweetness.

I can not shape the sound—tho' I have heard it:
Heard it in the night-wind and the rush of the rain!
Heard it in the dull monotony of the dozing noon!
Heard it among the leaves when Winds were fagged
at nightfall!

Kind as the shade, this sound.
Kind as the dull blue shade that blade-like cuts
A kingdom of coolness from the cruel Noon:
Soft as the kiss of the Stream to the drooping Leaf;
Sad as the pale Sun's smile over the Blizzard's bier;
Deep and resonant as distant thunder after a day of
heat;
Mystic as the dream of the illimitable Prairie under
the August glare;
Mysterious as the blue haze in which the turbid River
dwindles to a creek!

I cannot speak the language of the Hills.
I am unskilled to sing the notes of the June South-wind.
The Noon croons not with such a tongue as mine.

Yet—even tho' I be dead, this sound shall call you for me!
In the still blue nights—listen! and you shall hear it!
In the burst of the storm it shall be as a whisper to you!
The Morning shall sing it for you and the Sunset paint its meaning,
Even upon a background of burning gold, and from the palette of the Rainbow!

I would that my tongue could shape this sound my spirit calls you.
It would be as a rose-leaf becoming vocal;
As a honeycomb talking of sweetness!
And it would pass slowly and gloriously as a sunset passes;
Gloriously and lingeringly it would die away,
Leaving upon my strangely nervous lips
The faint suggestion of a fragrance.

V

AT PARTING

NO more from light to light, from gloom to gloom,
Shall you grow up about me, making bloom
Each individual moment like a rose.
From morning to the quiet evening's close,
From dusk unto the coming of the sun,
I feel the hours grow empty one by one.
It is the way of life—a look, a smile,
A slow sweet joy for just a little while;
Then going, then forgetting, then the slow
Monotony of days that come and go.

And yet, in spite of our diverging ways,
You have a place in all my nights and days.
The dim, mysterious, purple nights of moon
Shall sing you to me with a quiet tune.
When skies grow soft and blue in after days,
Then shall I feel your pure, calm, searching gaze.
And ever when the Green World wakes in dew,
I shall breathe in the fragrant soul of you.

So Night shall be my servant, and the Day
Shall conjure back that which has passed away;

That sweet and calm and kind, elusive thing—
A song that I conceived, but could not sing;
A dream I dreamed, but waking could not live;
Sweet wine for which my goblet was a sieve!

VI

LONGING

O HOLD no more the prize of wealth before me,
Nor hope of praise;
Nor talk of things men toil for, to deplore me
My dream-filled days!

My spirit, weary of the dreary gabble,
The sinning, grinning world,
Should float, cloudlike, in calm above the rabble,
Content and furled.

Give me a fastness distant from the city,
The human sea
Which I should hate, were not I forced to pity,
Because akin to me.

There in the wilds with only you to love me
And none to hate,
I could feel Something good and strong above me,
More kind than Fate.

The Wind would take my hand and lead me kindly
Through the wild;

And teach me to believe in beauty blindly,
Like a child.

I could forget the aches of hope and failing,
That with slow fires consume
This fevered flesh that goes on groping, wailing
Toward the gloom.

Far from the bitter grin of human faces
I could sing:
Robed in the vast and lonesome purple spaces
Like a king.

VII

IT MAY BE

IT may be we shall meet again hereafter,
When we have grown too wise at length for tears;
And we shall say with strange, hysteric laughter,
"My friend, how have you fared in all these years?"
And we shall chatter, two old folk and toothless,
About the golden dawn of life, and smile
To see how Time, with heavy hand and ruthless,
Hath scrawled upon the dial.

And I shall take your hand, poor wrinkled hand,
Too nerveless grown to feel as now a thrill,
And I shall try to make you understand—
I wonder if you will.

And I shall look dim-eyed into your eyes
With twilight in them where the day now glows,
And search for some dim vestige of old skies
With dawn a-blossom in them like a rose.
And in some manner, strange, inscrutable,
Some spark of psychic interchange may grow,
That after all these years it may be well,
And love light up the shadows where we go.

VIII

SHOULD WE FORGET

I WONDER if the skies would be so blue,
Or grass so kindly green as 'twas of old,
Or would there be such freshness in the dew
When purple mornings blossom into gold:
I wonder would the sudden song of birds,
Thrilling the storm-hushed forest dripping wet
After a June shower, be as idle words,
Should we forget.

I wonder if we'd feel the charm of night
Divinely lonesome with the glow of moons;
Or would we prize the intermittent light
Burning the zenith with its transient noons:
I wonder if the twilight could avail
To charm us, as of old when suns had set,
If all these many dream-sweet days should fail—
And we forget.

IX

COME BACK

COME back and bring the summer in your eyes,
The peace of evening in your quiet ways;
Come back and lead again toward Paradise
The errant days!

Of old I saw the sunlight on the corn,
The wind-blown ripple running on the wheat;
But now the ways are shabby and forlorn
That knew your feet.

Forget the words meant only by my lips!
Could you not understand
The language of my fevered finger-tips
When last you took my hand?

X

IN AUTUMN

DREAR, dull autumnal rain,
Skies washed to gray;
Winds sighing like an unfleshed ancient pain;
Uncanny day!

A time for tears and musings on the past,
For vain regret;
A time to dream of joys that could not last
But mock us yet.

A time to dream of winter and to mourn;
To hear sad tunes;
To yearn unto the far and shadowed bourne
Of perished Junes.

Yet not for me this drear autumnal mood,
This winter fear;
I view from no dull mental solitude
The aging Year.

For me—the memory of sun-shot days,
Nights kind and warm;

Moons purpling the weird star-enchanted haze;
The April storm!

The rain's drone on the roof, the wind's lament
Among the trees;
These make me hear through days of warm content
The hum of bees.

I hear the wailing and I see the skies,
Yet feel no pain;
I hear and see with spirit ears and eyes
The robin in the rain.

Because I see with eyes that saw your face
As none had seen;
And hear with ears that heard you—every place
Is summer-green.

And I shall hear the robin through the fall
And in the snow;
Because you live and breathe and love in all,
Where'er I go.

XI

THE SUBTLE SPIRIT

I BUILT a temple for my spirit's home;
I filled it with myself—and it was fair.
From its dream-pavement to its dream-reared dome
No spirit but my own existed there.
About the walls I wrought with doting care
Huge fancies alien to the world of men,
Vague daubs and vast of youth and light and air
Sublimely isolated in my spirit's den,
I lived and toiled and dreamed, and hoped—and
then—and then—
Another spirit entered, subtle, slow,
Like summer coming when the winter flees,
With eyes that had the soft, warm, quiet glow
Of some calm evening of a day of ease:
And that was you!
I felt, upon my knees,
A swift, mysterious spreading of the place!
My poor walls seemed to hold infinities
Too vast for peace! I fell upon my face
And worshiped you at last, the spirit of the place!

XII

CHASER OF DIM VAST FIGURES

CHASER of dim vast figures in the mist,
Drawn by far cries, an alien to content,
Builder of burning worlds that passed in gloom,
Vain architect of great sky-spaces, filled
With unreal suns uncurtaining the day
That fell again in dismal night—'Twas I!

A pigmy in all else but daring dreams,
A grasper after monstrous shadow-shapes,
With stars for eyes and mass of cloud for cloak
And dreams for blood and winds of night for voice;
I sought, they fled; and wailing after—I!

And wailing after—I: for somewhere lurked
The awful form of Beauty Absolute;
A pagan goddess, vast of limb and thigh,
With burning hills for breasts, and for a face
Dim features dazzled with an inward sun;
A form of classic curves, voluptuous slope
Of neck and shoulders downward to the breasts;
Arms warm and languid as the soul of Love
And scintillant as rockets of the dawn!

And at her feet I dreamed to lay my head,
A pigmy worshiper, who could not reach
Unto the ankles mountain-high, where blazed
Circles of jewels like chained satellites,
To touch which with the finger-tips were death!

And I would guess sweet guesses—how her hair
Made sunlight upward where my eyes saw not;
How sweet the thunder of her beating heart
And terrible! I sought and found her not.

Yet everywhere I saw her with my soul:
Saw her in girlhood, strolling with the Spring;
And in the sultry summer sunsets saw
The glory of her searching woman-eyes,
That made me sing strange songs of sweet despair.
And I have watched her hair trail down in flame
The vapor plains and mountains of the West!
Thus loving what was not, the dreamer—I!

And as I reached my eager arms to clasp
The prodigy that fled—*you* filled them full,
And in my hair I felt your fingers move,
And felt your woman's lips about my face,
And felt your cool cheek on my fevered cheek.
So I have lost the wish to dream again.

XIII

THE TEMPLE OF THE GREAT OUTDOORS

LO! I am the builder of a temple!
Even I, who groped so long for God
And laughed the cackling laugh to find the darkness empty,
I am the builder of a temple!

The toiling shoulders of my dream heaved up the arch
And set the pillars of the Dawn,
The burning pillars of the Evening and the Dawn,
Under the star-sprent, sun-shot, moon-enchanted dome of blue!

And I, who knew no God,
Stood straight, unhumbled in my temple:
I did not fear the subtle Mystery of the Darkness,
And I was only glad to feel the miraculous rush of sunlight in my blood!

I did not bend the knee.
I was unafraid, unashamed, careless and defiant.

I was a laughing Ego that felt within itself the thrill
of potential godhood:
I stood as in the center of the Universe and laughed!

And in my temple there were songs and organ tones,
And there was a silent Something holier than prayer.
I heard the winds and the streams and the sounds of
many birds:
I heard the shouting of storms and the moaning of
snows;
I heard my heart, and it was lifted up in song.
The Wind passing in a gust was as though an organ
had been stricken by the hands of a capricious
Master!

There was movement in the air, motion in the leaves,
a stirring in the grass,
Even as of the reverent moving about of a congre-
gation.
Yet I stood alone in my temple; I stood alone and was
not afraid.

But once a Something glided into my temple
And I became afraid!
As the Moon-woman of the Greeks the Something
seemed,
Lithe and swift and pale,
A fitting human sheath for the keen chaste spirit of a
sword!

And then it seemed my temple was too small.
The Presence filled it to the furthest nook!
There was no lonesomeness in any cranny!

I knelt—and was afraid!

I felt the Presence in the winds;
I heard it in the streams;
I saw it in the restless changing of the clouds!

I tried to be as I had been, unbending, not afraid—
godless.

Subtle as the scent of the unseen swinging censer of the
wild flowers
That Presence crept upon me!

I fled from the terrible sunlight that burned the dome
of my temple!
Childlike I hid my head in the darkness!
But I am not alone.

Where I have laughed defiantly into the blind empti-
ness,
Something moves!
I have placed my irreverent hand upon a Something in
the Shadow!
I tremble lest that the Thing shall illumine itself as
the Dawn;
I tremble lest at last I must see God—
See God and laugh no more.

XIV

WHEN I AM DEAD

WHEN I am dead and nervous hands have thrust
My body downward into careless dust;
I think the grave cannot suffice to hold
My spirit 'prisoned in the sunless mould!
Some subtle memory of you shall be
A resurrection of the life of me.
Yea, I shall be, because I love you so,
The speechless spirit of all things that grow.
You shall not touch a flower but it shall be
Like a caress upon the cheek of me.
I shall be patient in the common grass
That I may feel your footfall when you pass.
I shall be kind as rain and pure as dew
A loving spirit 'round the life of you.
When your soft cheeks by perfumed winds are fanned,
'Twill be my kiss—and you will understand.
But when some sultry, storm-bleared sun has set,
I will be lightning if you dare forget!

XV

IN DEJECTION

THIS thing I hold so closely in my arms,
Feeling its heart leap strongly at my kiss,
Its eyes closed gently like two cloud-veiled stars,
Its breath like some soft night wind on my neck;
What is it?— This soft thing I hold so closely?

Ah, head, like some pale flower asleep in shade,
Ah, breast, at which my passionate hands have thrilled,
O languid arms and white hands veined with blue,
A little while and these may be a lump
To make me shudder with a dismal dread!

O precious Thing of Flesh!
Let me exhaust the softness of your cheek
With one long desperate kiss, as one who drinks
The final maddening drop before the cup
Be shattered into dust! O let me breathe
Your breath that I have made more quick and warm,
As one who drowns and takes the latest gasp!
The time may come when my fond touch shall fail
To cause your sigh, and my hot kiss be vain
To make your blue-veined temples throb as now.

I see your sunken eyes, your rose-like cheek
Burned black with agony! And I shall be
So jealous of the ground that shall embrace you,
So jealous of the grass that grows above you,
So jealous of the silence that enfolds you.

XVI

A FANCY

IF I should die, and some strong Voice should say
Unto my soul lost in the vast black Deep,
"Where wouldst thou take, O Soul, thy future way,
Wouldst still live on in pain, or fall asleep?"
I know that I would say, "O let me creep
Into the roots of some rose she loves well;
Grow upward with the sap of spring and steep
Its petals with this love I cannot tell;
Breathe out these dreams in perfume that could speak
My longings for her, for which words are weak!
Thus grow one swift, soft summer day, then feel
The pang of plucking through my fibers reel!
I would not then go wailing after light;
I would not feel the terror of the Night;
I would not weary of the endless rush
Of mad blind Cycles through the awful Hush!
I would not tire of the circling years,
But I would be a song to soothe the aching Spheres!"

XVII

RETROSPECT

WHEN first I looked upon your face
It seemed to me it was not new;
It seemed from some far distant place
I but remembered you:
For some sweet subtle feeling told
That we two once had loved of old.

The clear-cut curve of lip and chin,
The low fond voice, the gentle way;
By these I knew that we had been
Fond lovers in our day:
It seemed I heard you singing still
To me by some Thessalian rill!

Perhaps I was a shepherd lad
And you a shepherd maid;
And Oh! what kisses sweet we had
The while our two flocks strayed—
Strayed off with distant bleat and bell
Adown some green Achæan dell.

Perhaps I was a bard and wrought
Some golden martial story,
How Helen loved, how Hector fought,
My harp a-thrill with glory:
Again you bring those mystic years,
I hear your praise, I feel your tears.

The golden God sat in my shell
And Venus breathed in you;
Did not I sing both wild and well?
Did not I warmly woo?
Perhaps we swooned to some sweet wrong
That thrilled us like a battle song!

O let us take the ancient way,
The way we knew of old
Ere Time flew o'er and made us gray,
Ere Death had made us cold:
Again the old sweet way begin!—
How can it lead us into sin?

XVIII

RECOGNITION

WHAT far-hurled cry is this—what subtle shout
That drives the winter of my spirit out
With trumpets and the cymballed joy of spring?
No more am I the shivering beggared thing
That dreamed of summer in a bed of snow!
Hark how the scarlet trumpets madly blow
A glad, delirious riot of sweet sound!

O I have found
At last the soul I lost so long ago
In Thessaly, where Peneus' waters flow!
For thou wert Laïs, and of yore 'twas thus
That thou didst speak to me—Hippolochus!
And I have not forgot.

Still dreaming of the old impassioned spot,
I passed through many pangful births in Time,
Weaving in many tongues the aching rhyme
That groped about and cried for thee in vain!
Of many deaths I passed the gates of pain;
And down to many hells the bitter ways
I trod, still seeking for the ancient days.

Through many lands in many women's eyes
I longed to overtake thee with surprise.

O the long ages that I sought for thee!
Hast thou kept pure the ancient drink for me?
Who touched with careless lips my goblet's brim,
Daring to dream the vintage was for him?
Half jealous of those lips of dust am I!

O let us journey back to Thessaly,
And from faint echoes build the olden song!
Hast thou forgotten, through these ages long,
The tinkle of the sheep-bells and the shrill
Glad oaten reeds of shepherds on the hill?
Our days of sultry passion and the nights
That flashed the dizzy lightning of delights?

At last I feel again thy finger-tips!
Be as a purple grape upon my lips,
Made sweet with dew of dreams, and wholly mine!
O let me drink the sweet forbidden wine
Crushed out with bruising kisses! Death is near,
And I shall lose thee once again, my dear!

The dust of ages chokes me! Quick! The wine!
Lift up the goblet of thy lips to mine!

The bony Terror! Hark his muffled drums!—
Let us be drunken when the Victor comes!

XIX

CONFESSION

MY love is like the snarl of haughty drums
And blare of trumpets, when a great one comes
Down some thronged breathless city thoroughfare:
And yours is like a song that fills the air
Of evening when the dew has made it sweet
And Peace walks through the dusk with quiet feet.

My love is like the visual shout of red
That threads the drowsing of a poppy bed
In summer, when the sun makes heavy heat:
And yours is like the white flower, cool and sweet,
That fills the kind shade with a pleasant scent,
Unshrivelled with the sun and well content.

My dreams come robed in scarlet flame to me
And lead through gardens of strange phantasy
My fevered feet; where heavy odors cling
And birds of blood-red plumage nest and sing
Delirious loves, mad doubts and sacred trust,
The pathos and the joy of human dust.

XX

WEARY

MY brain is weary with the whirling day!
Snatch me away!
Away from cold, sane living, quiet breath!

I ne'er have seen the proof of human laws:
Only the warm vast Cause
Shall lead me to your arms, your breast, your lip!
Teach me to sip
The sweetness out of living unto death!

I only know I draw a fevered breath,
I only know my eyes are fagged and dim—
Fill up my soul with beauty to the brim!

I am so weary, and your lips are red—
Pillow my head!

XXI

IF THIS BE SIN

CAN this be sin?
This ecstasy of arms and eyes and lips,
This thrilling of caressing finger-tips,
This toying with incomparable hair?
(I close my dazzled eyes you are so fair!)
This answer of caress to fond caress,
This exquisite maternal tenderness?
How could so much of beauty enter in,
If this be sin?

Can it be wrong?
This cry of flesh to flesh, so like a song?
This fusing of two atoms with a kiss,
Hurled toward the black and pitiless abyss?

Can it be crime
That we should snatch one happy hour from Time—
Time that has naught but death for you and me?
(How soon, O Dearest, shall we cease to be!)
And could one frenzied hour of love or lust
Add to the final tragedy of dust?

E'en though we be two sinners burned with bliss,
Kiss me again, that warm round woman's kiss!
Close up the gates of gold! I go not in
If this be sin.

XXII

LET DOWN YOUR HAIR

UNBIND your hair and let its masses be
Soft midnight on the weary eyes of me.
I faint before the dazzle of your breast;
Make shadow with your hair that I may rest,
And I will cool my fevered temples there:
Let down your hair.

Ah—so! It falls like night upon a day
Too bright for peace. It is a cruel way
That leads to this, alas, which is but pain.
I am athirst—your tresses fall like rain:
Ah, wrap me close and bind me captive there
Amid your hair!

How much my soul has given that my flesh
Might lie a thrall in this enchanted mesh!
Something I grope for that I used to hold;
Something it was bought dearly—cheaply sold;
Something divine was strangled unaware
Here in your hair!

But no—I will not grieve—will not complain.
Let your hair fall upon me like night rain

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And shut me from myself, and make me blind!
How can I deem this bondage aught but kind?
And yet—I cannot sleep for some dumb care
Here in your hair.

XXIII

THE LYRIC NIGHT

O GIRL, if you could die before the dawn
Makes shoddy this the garment of our dream,
Above your shapely form of chiseled ice
I could weep tears of gladness, seeing how
The bitter freeze of death had chastened you!

But Day will come a-knocking at the blinds,
Flooding the secret nooks of our delight,
And all the gaud and tinsel of this dream
Which now seems gold, shall be a mockery!
The night lamp's glow, conniving at our joy,
Shall struggle vainly with the virile Dawn,
Sending a loathsome odor from its grease!
And you and I—immortal seeming now
Upon the charmed Olympus of this couch—
Shall groan to feel our putrid life-in-death!

O I could smile upon you here in death,
For Death is chaste and wise and very kind;
But my soul aches that it must see you walk
To-morrow in the vulgar gaze of Day,
Lifelike, yet dead—so dead to what you were.

Kiss me again before the stars snuff out!
Once more before the lyric Night be lost
Amid the prosy droning of the Day!

XXIV

TITAN-WOMAN

O GREAT kind Night,
Calm Titan-Woman Night!
Broad-bosomed, motherly, a comforter of men!
Reach out thy arms for me
And in thy jeweled hair
Hide thou my face and blind mine aching eyes!

I hate the strumpet smile
Of Day! No peace hath she.
Draw thou me closer to thy veilèd face!
For thou art womanlike,
A lover and a mother,
And thou canst wrap me close and make me dream,
As one not cursed with light.
I shall forget my flesh,
This flesh that burns and aches
And fevers into hideous, shameless deeds!

And in the sweet blind hours
I shall seek out thy lips,
I shall dream sweetly of thy Titan form;

The languid majesty
Of smooth colossal limbs
At ease upon the hemisphere for couch!

And of thy veilèd face
Sweet fancies I shall fashion;
Half lover-like I seek thee, yearning toward thee!
For I am sick of light,
Mine eyes ache, I am weary.

O Woman, Titan-Woman!
Though lesser ones forsake me,
Yet thou wilt share my couch when I am weary.
Thy fingers! Ah, thy fingers!
They touch me! Lift me closer,
Extinguish me amid thy jeweled tresses!

Thou wert the first great Mother,
Shalt be the last fair woman:
White breasts of flesh grow cold, soft flesh lips wither:
O First and Ultimate,
O Night, thou Titan-Woman,
Thou wilt not fail me when these fall to dust!

The moon upon thy forehead!
The stars amid thy black locks!
Extinguish me upon thy breast, amid thy tresses!

XXV

AT DAWN

LISTEN! All the world is still;
One bleared hour and night is gone.
See yon lonely moon-washed hill
Lift its head to catch the dawn!

In the east the eager light
Sets the curtained dusk a-sag;
And all the royal robe of Night
Frays cheaply—like a rag!

Once I felt a lifting joy
When I saw the day unfurl,
Watching, just a laughing boy,
For the Morning Girl.

Oft I met her in the dew
Face to face, her sapphire eyes
Burning on me through the blue
Of the morning skies.

And her pure and dazzling breast
Made with joy my senses swoon,

As she burned from crest to crest
Upward toward the noon.

Now no more I seek her shrine,
Seek no more her golden hair
Sparkling in the morning shine
And the purple air.

Comes no more the Morning Girl,
Glows not now her golden head,
When the clouds of dawn unfurl—
Purple, yellow, red.

Now the waning of the night
Means another day is near;
Just a haggard splotch of light,
A turning of the sphere!

Would that in the coming hour
I might be that boy who knew
Fragrant import of the flower,
Lyric impulse of the dew!

XXVI

ACROSS THE SEA OF CENTURIES

DEAD Kin of mine,
O savage ancient Kin!
I call to you across the night of years,
I reach out groping toward you across the sea of centuries!
Mine eyes are dazzled with the light of Now;
Mine ears are weary with the babblings of the overwise!

A far-blown spirit, half conscious of an ancient bigness,
Unable to forget the good huge lusts of old,
Refleshed in weaker flesh than thine (Once mine!)
O ancient Kin,
I blunder, blunder, blunder in these modern ways.

In the ways of men too sensitive I stumble!
This frail and hot-house body shrivels in the heat of mine archaic breathing!

The sun of old-world wildernesses arouses me at dawn,
And, half awake, I breathe the breath of Gallic forests;

I scent the good blood-tang of primitive fights;
I nose the steam of kettles and the hunks of brawn that
fed me and my Kin.

And in the nights I feel the breath of giant women:
I feel their coarse blonde hair about my face.
Their strong hands caress me.
Comforters of battling men are they,
Breeders of fighting men,
Sucklers of the big and unafraid!

O ancient Mate of mine!
O good blonde Giantess,
Blown far to hitherward through the weird ways of
my sleeping!
Thou knowest the hidden beauty of my lusts!
Touch me in my prison of the Present!
Thine eyes are blue with the calm understanding of the
old skies,
And thine hempen hair exhales the breath of the forests
of home.

Over our ancient camps are builded the cities of the
Anæmic.
The gods of our old believing are fled,
And men of lesser dreams, hair-splitters and too wise,
Have builded little walls about a shriveled-up divinity!
While I—of ancient spirit and of modern flesh—
Go blundering through the fragile scheme of things,
Feeling old loves and lusts and with a little voice
Shouting aloud rude snatches of old cries!

I long for the smoke-tang of vanished campfires!
I hunger for the feasts of bigger men!
Too frail for these old giant lusts, I shrivel,
And my heart aches for home.

XXVII

THE CRY OF THE SAMSON IN ME

I MUST shake off this blindness like a veil
That shuts me from the daylight of endeavor,
For I have slept too long! I feel the joy
Of battle thrill the muscles of my arms
That have grown flabby fighting only phantoms
And wrestling with vain things beneath my strength.

I must arise and stretch my terrible arms
Again as ere Delilah clipt my locks!
Out of this couch of sloth my limbs I'll hurl!
Breathe once again the breath of mighty odds,
And I shall cry a challenge to the Days
That mocked the Giant sleeping like a babe!

For I have lain as lies a fallen tower,
Content to be the hiding place of weeds
And eaten with the lichen-teeth of sloth.
I must tear off this midnight from mine eyes
And let the Noon burn there! Oft have I waked
From dreams that whipped my slumbering blood to flame,

And for one terrible moment I have leaned
Upon my quivering elbows; but alas!
My blindness struck me down upon my back
And left me dreaming of unconquered things!

O I must 'rise ere blindness drives me mad,
When I should shake down in my poor despair
The sacred temple of my better self.

XXVIII

THE CITY OF DUST

BEHOLD me—a shadow!
The shadow of an ancient laughing thing!

Fallen columns disintegrated with time;
Sacred mounds insulted with the growth of scornful weeds;
Shattered arches haunted with the lizard and the snake:
This is my Babylon—the Babylon I built and feasted in!

O, but the wantonness of my Babylon!
The princely prodigality of my Babylon!
This was the throne—I sat upon it.
I sat upon it and feasted mine ears with the haughty trumpets,
Mine eyes with the scarlet and purple of Pride.

And once in this long fallow garden a lily grew:
It was my Lily—it grew for me.
The weeds grow there now—they grow for me.
They grow there now and flaunt their ragged coats in the sun—
Ruffians and shameless!

If I weep above my fallen Lily, will it grow?

The lizard flees from me and the snake hisses,
And I am lonesome—lonesome in my Babylon.

How shall I pile up again the kingly walls?
I cry out: my voice is as the yell of a jackal—impotent.
The Wind dances with the Dust athwart my tessellated courtyards;
The Wind and the Dust—their music is a threnody.

How can I rebuild my Babylon?
How conjure back the magic of the olden time?
How can I rebuild my dust heaps into a city—
The City of My Ancient Dream?

XXIX

LET ME LIVE OUT MY YEARS

LET me live out my years in heat of blood!
Let me die drunken with the dreamer's wine!
Let me not see this soul-house built of mud
Go toppling to the dust—a vacant shrine!

Let me go quickly like a candle light
Snuffed out just at the heyday of its glow!
Give me high noon—and let it then be night!
Thus would I go.

And grant that when I face the grisly Thing,
My song may trumpet down the gray Perhaps!
Let me be as a tune-swept fiddlestring
That feels the Master Melody—and snaps!

XXX

PRAYER OF AN ALIEN SOUL

O CENTER of the Scheme,
Star-Flinger, Beauty-Builder, Shaping Dream!
Now as the least in all thy space I stand
An alien in a strange and lonesome land.
I lift a little voice of pigmy pain;
I hurl it out—up—down—and shall I cry in vain?
Hear thou the prayer that struggles in this song—
Let me not linger long!

I crave the boon of dying into life!
Extend a pitying knife
And let these flesh-gyves part, let me be free!
Are we not kin? Am I not part of Thee?
Am I not as a ripple in a cranny of thy Sea?
What part have I in sequent wretched eves,
Blear dawns, dull noons, the budding and the falling
of the leaves?
Why must I drag about this chain of years,
Long rusted-red with tears?
Why must I crawl when I have wings to fly?
Behold thy child—the Winged One—it is I!

Was not I made to sing?
But here I lisp, and twang one yet unbroken string!

At times here in the dust
I lift my head, I strive to sing—*I must!*
The miracle of growing wraps me round!
Light! Sound!
Form! Motion! Upward yearning! Outward reaching!
A universal praying, dumb beseeching!
I feel that I am more than flesh and futile,
A being ultra-carnal, super-brutal!
I understand these growing green beseechers,
These hopeful climbers and these earnest reachers!
I understand their yearnings every one,
How each tense fiber hungers for the sun!
I lay my hand upon the sturdy weed
Whose darkling purpose burst the prison-seed
And cleft the mud and took its light and dew,
Looked up, reached out, believed in life—*and grew!*
I know that we are kin;
That hope is virtue and that doubt is sin;
And o'er me comes a hungering for song:
I lift my voice—I falter. Ah, the long
Dumb years, the aching nights and days!
And yet I raise
My unavailing cacophonic cry.
Thine erstwhile singing child—behold!—'Tis I!

In this strange wretched prison of the soul
Shall I not lose my swiftness for the Goal?

It seems I must
At length become too much the kin of Dust.
Ah me, the fever born of Hate and Lust!
Ah me, the senseless unmelodic din!
Ah me, the soul-hope sick with fleshly sin!

And in my prison ancient dreams grow up
To fill with dust my cracked and thirst-betraying cup.
Dreams mantled in the purple of dead glory
That filled the æons out of reach of human story:
Not always have I worn these dusty rags!

The Purpose of my being falters, lags,
And I am sick, sick, sick to live again.
Yet not because of this poor dust-born pain
Do I cry out and grope about for Thee.
I hear the far cry of my Destiny,
Whose meaning sings beyond the furthest sun.
I faint in these red chains—O let me 'rise and run!

How long shall leaves grow green and fade and fall,
How long shall Night chase Day and Day flee Night,
How long shall my far Purpose vainly call
Ere I remingle with my native light?
O Center of the Scheme,
Star-Flinger, Beauty-Builder, Shaping Dream!
Hear thou the prayer that struggles in this song—
Let me not linger long.

XXXI

THE ANCIENT STORY

IT is the ancient story lived anew.
Dost thou remember how the mighty Jew
Spoke at the table of the Pharisee
And puzzled all who heard Him; tenderly
Forgiving her whose soul was red with sin
And seared with lust? How that she entered in
Where sat the Lord, and cast her down and wept?
How to His feet she crept
And washed them with her tears, and humbly there
Made a soft foot-cloth of her tumbled hair,
Anointing Him with nard?
Howe'er that be,
I have lived out this ancient tale with thee;
Only I am the sinner, thou the saint.
With heart bowed down and limbs grown strangely faint,
I creep unto thy feet; with half a prayer
A-whisper on my lips; and with my hair
Make softness for thy feet; cleanse off with tears
The stains they got that followed all these years
The guilty paths I made, the cruel ways
That led unto a blood-red night of haze.
They were my paths, and this for thee sufficed!

I gaze into thine eyes and see the Christ,
Calm-eyed, great-souled, the Pitier! I see
How much and yet how little after me
Thine aching feet have followed! See how deep
I grovel from the height that thou dost keep,
A sinner, yet unsoiled.
Lift thou me there
Unto the heaven of thy face and hair
That shines for me far off as summer dawn.
The night is gone!
I feel the sunrise quicken in my blood!
My soul leaps clean from out its lair of mud!

With nard I do anoint thee; at thy feet
I burn this myrrh of bitter and of sweet.

Lift thou me there
Unto the heaven of thy face and hair,
And make my soul complete!

XXXII

THE LAST ALTAR

EREWHILE from out the lightning flare of passion
I saw huge visions flung athwart the gloom;
I built me altars after pagan fashion
And of mine hours I made a hecatomb.

I wrought weird gods of night-stuff and of fancy;
I sought their hidden faces for my law:
My days and nights were filled with necromancy,
And an Olympian awe.

O many a night has seen my riot candles,
And heard the drunken revel of my feast,
Till Dawn walked up the blue with burning sandals
And made me curse the east!

For my faith was the faith of dusk and riot,
The faith of fevered blood and selfish lust;
Until I learned that love is cool and quiet
And not akin to dust.

For once, as in Apocalyptic vision,
Above my smoking altars did I see

My god's face, veilless, ugly with derision—
The shameless, magnified, projected—*Me!*

And I have left mine ancient fanes to crumble,
And I have hurled my false gods from the sky;
I wish to grasp the joy of being humble,
To build great Love an altar ere I die.

XXXIII

RESURRECTION

THERE—close your eyes, poor eyes that wept for me!
Pillow your weary head upon my arm.
You need not clutch me so, I will not flee;
Here am I bound by no mere carnal charm.

At last I am not blind, for I can see
Through your mere flesh as only spirit can;
I feel at last the world-old tragedy,
The sacrifice of woman unto man.

In that far time when my first father sought
To cool the strange mad fever in his veins,
Seeing how fair the creature he had bought
With straining sinews and wild battle pains;

Then was this moment of your anguish sown
And you have reaped but do not understand.
How frail and thin your blue-veined hands have grown,
How trustingly they clutch my guilty hand!

The story of the world is in your face;
I gaze upon it, hearing through dead years
The wailings of the women of the race,
The melancholy fall of many tears.

In many a Garden of Gethsemane,
Sweet with strange odors, redolent of bliss,
Again is played the human tragedy
With Judas waiting in the dark to kiss.

Not only upon Calvary has died
The patient tortured Christ misunderstood;
Over and over is He crucified
Wherever man besmirches womanhood.

I who have laughed too long at sacred things,
Who felt no god about me in the gloom,
Now hear a Something mystical that sings
Sweeter than love, yet terrible as doom.

In your frail face I see a glory grow
That smites me, guilty, like a burning rod!
I kneel before you, suppliant, and know
That your thin hands may lead me unto God!

END

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